
Comments at the Community Participation Forum
May 2014

Friends of Forge Road and Toano

Land Use and Agricultural Economic Development

Team Members:

I have included some background information on our organization Friends of Forge Road and Toano along with our comments about the Character of Toano, Land Use and Agricultural Economic Development.

Background:

Friends of Forge Road and Toano (F.O.R.T.) is a nonprofit group of 56 concerned citizens trying to guide growth and promote recognition of the unique history of upper James City County. Since our inception in 2004, we have worked to promote smart growth, preserve natural and cultural resources, and encourage compatible economic development.

F.O.R.T. participates in a variety of activities such as Adopt- A- Highway and Neighborhood Watch. We obtained support for the Toano Design and Streetscape Study, which the BOS approved in February 2006. Because of the economic downturn, most of the study's recommendations have not been implemented.

More recently, we hosted an Economic Development Forum (2012) for small businesses and in 2013, several F.O.R.T. board members attended a program conducted by VA Main Street.

Over the years, we have obtained JCC grants for signage and median beautification in an effort to promote the uniqueness of the village of Toano. Our recent success is the creation of an exhibit, called Times in Toano. It consists of photos and other items donated by local residents and reflects the 19th and early 20th century history of Toano. It will reside for one year at Norge Depot on the grounds of the JCC Library.

Character of Toano:

The following principles were included in the 2006 Toano Design and Streetscape Study referenced above. The principles form the foundation for the streetscape and design guidelines. We continue to advocate for these principles in the update to the Comprehensive Plan.

1. Highlight and honor history
2. Encourage appropriate growth that enhances unique small town character
3. Preserve open space; establish communal green space
4. Enhance pedestrian and bicycle environment while slowing vehicular traffic
5. Improve streetscape and landscape to create a sense of place

Vision for Rural Lands:

Toano's history is intrinsically linked to its farming heritage as reflected in the existing rural lands along Forge Road and its environs. We must value the rural land as our legacy to future generations. Colonial Williamsburg has provided many generations a compelling narrative of 18th century historic life, and that effort has provided a significant economic asset to our surrounding communities.

Likewise, James City County needs to value the importance of retaining its rural land (especially in the Toano and Forge Road environs) for its historic value and for fiscal, economic and environmental reasons. By doing this, we hope that visitors would be interested in experiencing the beauty of the upper county and learning about its significance in our country's 19th and 20th century history (i.e. Revolutionary War Shipyard, battle grounds during the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, and former fishing industry on the Chickahominy River).

Land Use and Agricultural Economic Development:

We continue to urge the preservation of Rural Lands and consideration of the use of these lands for Agricultural Economic Development. In the past, citizens have expressed their support for the preservation of rural lands in the 2009 Comprehensive Plan, and authorizing \$20 million for purchase of open space through a 2006 referendum. We ask that JCC:

- Prepare a map of land already conserved through conservation easements either through Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) or through other groups (Williamsburg Land Conservancy, Nature Conservancy Virginia Outdoors Foundation), green space, and agricultural and forestal districts. With this type of map, the County planners could better identify those lands neighboring these locations which would have a higher priority for preservation.
- Continue to promote the importance of non-residential uses for rural lands in the new update to the Comp Plan. Agricultural businesses are a primary component to maintaining rural character. Some examples of these are Kel-Rae Farm (a CSA), Perry Properties (W&M Riding Program), Stonehouse Stables, and Cedar Valley Stables.
- Investigate how the county might offer or facilitate loan assistance for farmers and other rural landowners who outlined their difficulty in securing conventional loan funds for rural land use

- Continue to enhance small farm profitability through farmers' markets, farm to school and institution programs, selling to restaurants and other high value direct marketing opportunity sales.
- Provide incentives for rural land uses that promote the rural economy. We currently have a land use program in the county which provides tax breaks for landowners that keep their land in crop or timber. New incentives need to be designed to encourage rural **businesses** in place of residential development.
- Along with the Williamsburg/JCC tourism bureau, provide information about driving tours of scenic areas in the upper county. Also identify eco-tourism attractions such as fishing/boating (Little Creek Dam Park), biking trails, horseback riding, bird watching opportunities, etc. and integrate these into a visitor's activity list. Similarly, tours of local arts and crafts studios could be publicized and conducted.
- Review the principles and guidelines that were incorporated into the 2009 Comprehensive Plan when considering actions impacting rural lands.

Respectfully submitted.

Linda Rice
President, Friends of Forge Road and Toano